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ABSTRACT

Noting that college students in the 1990s are once again becoming interested in religious/spiritual phenomena, this analysis of religious humanism as persuasive discourse first touches upon the event-filled 1960s and 70s, which saw social unrest and turbulent change, much of it emanating from university students. As background, the analysis points out that during those same decades a sophisticated history-of-ideas scholarship emerged from communication scholars, joined with a humanistic interdisciplinary approach to examine the rhetorical discourse of mass movements and public campaigns. The analysis employs a theoretical model constructed by Bill Balthrop (1975) to examine the humanist-theist controversy within early 20th century Unitarianism as a rhetorical movement having enduring significance in the intellectual history of American religious experience. The analysis discusses: (1) the structure of the Unitarian group; (2) religious humanism as an emergent scientific perspective (giving attention to the discourse of its leaders John H. Dietrich, Curtis W. Reese, and Charles Francis Potter); (3) its membership and organization; and (4) agents of social control. The analysis concludes with a concise discussion of existentialism in American religious thought and with the hope that studying religious rhetoric in history will help today's students resolve their own ideas about life in the future. Contains 114 endnotes. (NKA)

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# Religious Humanism as a Rhetorical Movement

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## Background

The event-filled nineteen sixties and early -seventies were the historical context for the unfolding developments and growing momentum that characterizes turbulent social unrest and accelerated cultural change. From dramatic racial boycotts paralyzing Montgomery and Birmingham, from student-occupied university administration buildings stretching from Berkeley to Cambridge, and from chanting banner-bearing protestors filling the streets of San Francisco and New York's Washington Square arose a distinctive discourse forged with defiant affirmations and striking phrases. While communication scholars analyzed this spirited rhetoric in numerous theses and dissertations, students recognized the importance of rhetorical movements and reoccuring rhetorical patterns in American historical experience and concluded that speechmaking upon controversial contentions during crucial disputations exert a significant influence upon the development of American intellectual history.

A sophisticated history-of-ideas scholarship emerged as students examined the rhetorical discourse from mass movements and public campaigns. The single most significant consequence from this specific emphasis was probably an innovative interdisciplinary approach that employs the rich resources from the humanities. Communication students comprehended that persuasion happens within an elaborate, complex cultural context that Bitzer called the "rhetorical situation."[1] Understanding communicative behavior within this situation was facilitated by McBurney's observation that speaking happens within a context where relationships oftenexist between values, political systems, epistemologies, behavior, approaches

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for a speaker, and the outcomes.[2] This expanded perspective for studying communicative behavior was sustained by Baird's belief that rhetoric does not function as an isolated, independent discipline with a confined subject matter, but utilizes the various academic disciplines including logic, philosophy, ethics, psychology, political science, literature, language, science, and metaphysics.[3] The 1970 National Developmental Project on Rhetoric reinforced these expanded paramaters for communication studies by concluding that concepts about "reason" and "rational decision" should be expanded, emphasizing that rhetorical invention should receive primary attention, recommending a scholarly method more flexible than a mechanistic application of Aristoteliam and Burkeian models, and recognizing that concrete rhetorical transactions shold evoke their particular analytical categories and organic configurations. Rosenfield explained that the required revisions in communication studies are more extensive than simple rennovation and inherent within a general effort to regenerate historico-critical thought.[4] Booth described a "new rhetoric" as a pluralistic philosophy embracing "the whole of man's efforts to discover and share warrantable assent"[5] and declared that an interdisciplinary methodology for studying communicative phenomenona should employ psychology, sociology, anthropology, linguistics, and philosophy. Perleman stated that a "new rhetoric" should not remain restricted to using the techniques designed for analyzing a specific audience, a single communicative medium, or the contents within a particular message.[6] Believing that one cause for a decline in communication studies is a general tendency to separate subject-matter from rhetorical form and to divide thought from expression, Corbitt maintained that a "new rhetoric" should embrace the intellectual substance of communicative

discourse and the rhetorical form.[7] Bryant indicated that

> rhetoric should be seen as the comprehensive study which shows how the principles established or discovered by the behavioral scientist, as well as those from the social scientist, the historian, the moralist, the ethicist, the literary historian and critic, and the philosopher, may be organized and employed so as to best describe and account for the phenomena and the functioning of the suasory-instructional in discourse. 8

Bitzer emphasized that communicative studies and rhetorical practice are vitalized by their relationship to subject-matter.[9] One conference committee concluded:

> Rhetorical studies are properly concerned with the process by which symbols and systems of symbols have influence upon beliefs, values, attitudes, and actions, and they embrace all forms of human communication, not exclusively public address nor communication within any one class or cultural group. 10

Communication studies, the conference participants concluded, should "focus on how and in what ways man uses and is used by symbols of inducement; how man's symbol-using affects and determines personal and social decision-making, what values guide his conduct."[11] Students were encouraged to analyze "outgroup" communication that reveals rhetorical patterns in social movements; such research should discover the clusters of social values existing in various places and different periods. These scholars maintained that communicative studies are enriched when subject-matter and rhetorical form receive critical analysis, when communication is studied within complex dynamic relationships, and when interdisciplinary methodologies are constructed to illumine human symbolic interactions.

Studies analyzing rhetorical movements were strengthened with several doctoral dissertations that refined research methodologies. Feld examined the implications for social movement theory by surveying the definitions and classifications, and she synthesized hypotheses concerning the organization,

ideology, tactics, and life-cycles within movements.[12] Feld concluded that using a single research methodology is unnecessary and recommended that scholars should comprehend the implications in social movement theory and employ different methodologies. Anderson constructed dramatistic and rhetorical methodologies for analyzing ideological statements.[13] Harral concluded that traditional rhetorical concepts should be developed to embrace communicative behavior beside spoken discourse, developed a concept called "counter synthesis," emphasized combining rhetorical and sociological theories, and stated that contemporary communicative transactions should be addressed in an attempt to develop testable hypotheses.[14] Purnell described a social movement as a public drama or extended transaction between competing contengencies and their audience, and she examined the implied value premises supported by different advocates.[15] Wilder discovered that using a dialectical conflict model for studying socio-rhetorical process provided a viable methodology for analyzing the phases, developmental requirements, variables, and dialectical process within social movement life-cycles.[16] These doctoral dissertations demonstrated the need to construct new research methodologies and the importance of enlisting sociological information in communication studies.

Among the impressive books spawned by this academic approach was Stewart, Smith, and Denton's Persuasion and Social Movements.[17] Drawing extensively upon these accumulating studies, these three scholars summarized the growing knowledge about life-cycles, leadership, political argumentation, legitimation, and resistance. These authors described a social movement as an uninstitutionalized collectivity sufficiently wide in scope that proposes or opposes persuasively a program for social change and is countered by an established order. These writers

observed that periodically social movements have provided the impetus for almost all important socio-political change, and that public speeches are a significant form of social movement persuasion although they are neither the most prevalent nor necessarily the most effective. Describing rhetoric as "the rationale of instrumental symbolic behavior," Bowers and Ochs identified the communicative ingredients employed by agitators and institutions during struggles for social change and indicated the guidelines for making limited predictions about the subsequent outcome.[18] Among the countless articles appearing in the journals, Cathcart's paper explained that inaugurating a social movement requires articulate advocates who propose immediate correctives for an existing system and a reciprocal response from opposing advocates. "It is the reciprocity or dialectical enjoinment in the moral arena," Cathcart concluded, "which defines movements and distinguishes them from other dramatistic forms."[19]

Sociologists provided invaluable information during this interdisciplinary attempt to construct the models and methodologies for studying rhetorical movements. Toch described how problematic social situations nurture crises toward which susceptible persons become related or involved through persuasive appeals.[20] Toch discussed the motivations for joining movements, described how these collectives attempt to satisfy human needs, analyzed the psychology of susceptibility and conversion, pondered the tendency to perceive conspiracies and disaffection in the membership, probed the institutionalization process and life-cycles within social movements, and proposed an approach for evaluating the psychological consequences. Cameron studied the general characteristics, membership, structure, rationale, and methods of action in modern social movements.[21] In a significant study that had important implications for subsequent research, Smeltzer

identified six determinants affecting collective behavior that develop during a specific pattern: structural condusiveness, structural strain, growth and spread of a general belief, the precipitating factors, the mobilization of participants for action, and the operation of social control.[22]

Some sociological studies assisted in describing or defining social movements as collectives. The phrase, social movement, designated large groups that Heberle called "social collectives that function as change agents.[23] Klapp described a social movement as coordinated "clusters of collectivities" that function cooperatively.[24] And Brown observed a common characteristic when he concluded that social movements are subversive because these groups attempt to create, modify, or protect norms, values, and meanings.[25]

Psychological implications within sociological and communicative studies suggested that structural conduciveness or strain develops when people experience serious deprivation; that increasing frustration and prolonged alienation undermine norms, values, and meanings by nurturing symbolic imbalances;[26] and that exigencies become especially disturbing when persons' aroused expectations remain unfulfilled.[27] "At the basis of every social movement and social upheaval," Sherif and Sherif observed perceptively, "there is unrest and discontent suffered simultaneously by a large number of individuals in one segment of the population."[28] In successful social movements, charismatic speakers and writers are "set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers and qualities."[29] Social movements generate their leadership when charisma becomes projected from the membership to selected leaders. These emerging advocates enunciate specific messages and devise strategies to guide social movements toward the realization of a purpose or objective.

The theories presented by Humphreys, Brandes, and Hoffer assisted students in comprehending the developmental stages and dramatistic enactments within emerging social movements.

Humphreys maintained that two essential preconditions for initiating a movement are an oppressive sensation of intolerable reality and assurance of a conceivable change.[30] He described how rebellion develops against oppressive social norms when communicators employ rhetoric during opposition that initially is reformist and liberating; the writer explained how dissidents coagulate, creating recognized collectives that nurture social movements by providing concrete communicative symbols. Participation in an emerging movement becomes facilitated through a staged melodrama or symbolic enactment that ameliorates stigmatization and offers redemption. Humphreys concluded that frustration and deprivation stimulate an emerging movement, that the socio-political and moral-religious dimensions are difficult to distinguish during the early stages, and that the manner for resolving the tensions between "secular" and "religious" elements provides a method for classifying social movements. The author stated that social movements contain a strong religious component and that every revolution has a moral aspect:

> Most religions begin as social movements, and all revolutions are moral ones. That does not mean moral movements and religion are to be equated; rather they are symbiotically related. Every liberation movement has its religious side, and religions have their prophetic consciousness. 31

Brandes described three different developmental stages within movements.[32] Prolonged discontent culminates in wide-spread opposition against an established

system, during which persons who usually support the existing order advocate social change and revolutionaries seek to replace traditional communicative symbols. When the second stage happens during armed conflict between opposed contengencies, reconciling rhetoric disappears and blunt, terse discourse appears. The third stage becomes characterized by resistance exerted against counterrevolution by those persons who are in power, while the "powerless" sponsor counterrevolution, spread revolution through exploitation, and employ what Brandes called argumentum ad misericordiam (pity poor me) discourse.

Hoffer maintained that during the early active stage, social movements attract adherents who crave their riddance from an unwanted self, seek a "new life" or rebirth, and attempt to acquire pride and purpose. A primary preoccupation becomes the perfecting and preservation of associations for coordinating action and inspiring self-sacrifice; the movement provides a technique for separating an adherent from their "flesh-and-blood self" and assimilating the convert into a compact collective group. Hoffer indicated that numerous adherents who are attracted to an emerging movement perceive the prospect of a sudden spectacular change, usually profess the possession of irresistable power, express indomitable faith about the future, but remain uninformed or oblivious to the difficulties and problems that thwart their endeavor. Hoffer wrote that an emerging movement stimulates strong hope for the future and a renunciation of the historic past, but eventually the focus becomes shifted to a postponed hope and a distant glorious past. Maintaining that all movements draw their early followers from people who have a similar mind-set,

the author asserted that potential converts are recruited frequently from the social undesirables, whom Hoffer identified as the poor, misfits, outcasts, minorities, adolescents, ambitious, impotent, inordinately selfish, bored, and sinners.

Central within Hoffer's scheme is the dramatic conversion process. During the initial stages when believers seek an association with a "holy" cause or group, self-surrender through a staged sacrifice or enacted atonement provides a source for sustaining a movement; confession and repentance are useful techniques for eleminating a person's individual distinctness and social separateness; and salvation is secured by absorbing oneself within the "holy" oneness. Assimilation within the collective requires that a convert be stripped of individuality and deprived of independent judgment. However the exaltation experienced by the "true believer" emminates not from resources of wisdom and strength; the deliverance that develops stems from the elimination of what Hoffer described as "the meaningless burden of an autonomous existence" although the adherent remains "eternally incomplete, eternally insecure."[33]

When eagerness to follow abd dissatisfaction with an existing condition develops, a persuasive communicator must discredit the established system, challenge the prevailing ideology, undermine people's allegiance to existing institutions, foster receptivity to change among the disenchanted, and provide effective communication systems and rhetorical symbols. "The genuine man of words himself," Hoffer wrote,

> can get along without faith in absolutes. He values the search for truth as much as truth itself. He delights in the clash of thought and in the give-and-take of controversy. If he formulates a philosophy and a doctrine, they are more an exhibition of brilliance and an exercise in dialectics

than a program of action and the tenets of a faith....

The leader personifies the certitude of the creed and the defiance and grandeur of power. He articulates and justifies the resentment dammed up in the souls of the frustrated. He kindles the vision of a breathtaking future so as to justify the sacrifice of make-belief so indispensable for the realization of self-sacrifice and united action. He evokes the enthusiasm of communion - the sense of liberation from a petty and meaningless individual existence....

What counts is the arrogant gesture, the complete disregard of the opinion of others, the singlehanded defiance of the world. 34

Social movements develop as effective persuaders employ spoken and written discourse to provoke responses that require the emotional temperament and specific skills that characterize a fanatic; however the final consolidation of a movement requires the labor of practical men of action.

Among the unanswered questions are whether every social movement, especially the religious and the scientific, follow the same or a similar developmental pattern, and how movements are initially instigated. In 1963, however, a Unitarian Universalist committee concluded that a religious revolution develops when intense mental confusion and strong psychological disturbance becomes absorbed in a profoundly concerned individual who has discovered an inner resource that is greater than the perplexing problems that confront and bewilder most persons. An especially sensitive individual assimilates the trouble that pervades a particular period, transcends these difficulties with enlightened insight and illuminating vision, and articulates a revealing understanding about the deeper assurances within human experience. The committee reported:

Almost all theologies have their roots in the experience of one who has been capable of taking into himself much of the confusion, pain, and disorder of the times and transcending them and all that would demean, depress, or destroy self. With overwhelmment and transcendence come insights and illuminations, which is to say religious experience. An invariable and inseparable accompaniment of such experience is the

> rationale, on the part of the illuminated one, that serves as an explication of his experience. It is his attempt to see the illumination for what it is; also to express what has happened to him in words, imagery, the arts, in such wise as will give others not merely an idea but also a taste, a glimpse, a feel of what has come to him. 35

Examining the process through which a new scientific paradigm replaces a predecessor, Kuhn indicated that any new interpretation of nature, whether a discovery or a theory, emerges initially within the mind of one or a few individuals whose attention has been concentrated intensely upon a crisis-provoking problem and who are sufficiently young so that their practice has not committed them completely to preserving the prevailing paradigm. Kuhn said that "the new paradigm, or a sufficient hint to permit later articulation, emerges all at once, sometimes in the middle of the night, in the mind of a man deeply immersed in crisis."[36] The resulting transition to a new paradigm is a scientific revolution, which Kuhn described as a non-cumulative developmental episode in which an older paradigm becomes replaced in whole or in part with an incompatible new paradigm. Following a revolution, scientists respond to a new world; when paradigms are changed, the world is perceived differently. Kuhn described a scientific revolutions as "the tradition-shattering complements to the tradition-bound activity of normal science"[37] and a paradigm as "universally recognized scientific achievements that for a time provide model problems and solutions to a community of practitioners."[38]

Summarizing and synthesizing this abundant information into a convenient scheme for continuing investigations, Balthrop described a social movement as a collective action directed toward changing society, arising from some dissatisfaction with the present or prospect about the future, existing through time, and composed from a voluntary membership who are bound with a common ideology. Balthrop stated:

> From this, six major factors emerge: a source of strain producing dissatisfaction with existing scenic relationships, an ideology providing the "god" and "devil" terms which promote identification and create alternative hierarchies of order, membership which provides the collective nature of the movement and makes its impact felt by society, leadership which guides and administers the collective effort, organization which structures relations between leader, member, and non-movement groups, and, finally. agents of social control who exert an influence upon the nature of actions by which "dialectical enjoinment" is created. 39

## Purpose and Perspective

Employing the theoretical "model" constructed by Balthrop, this specific study examined the humanist-theist controversy within early twentieth-century Unitarianism as a rhetorical movement having enduring significance in the intellectual history of American religious experience. Responding to a powerful, pervading world-view prompted by man's growing scientific knowledge about the universe, humanists enunciated a distinctive persuasion that was different from the paradign in American religious thought. Within an unconventional religious movement, humanist ministers espoused a philosophy for modern living that was consistent with a scientific world-view encouraged by experimental empirical science. Parke said:

> The "peacefulness" of the period ended with the advent of religious humanism, the most significant theological development of the new century. Catching up the scientific and anti-supernaturalist currents of the day, humanism voiced them as a new world religion for modern man....
>
> Their message of man's uniqueness in an indifferent universe was enthusiastically received in the Midwest, as Free Religion and Ethical Unitarianism had been received before it. 40

In another account, Parke explained that like their spiritual forebearers in sixteenth-century Europe, the humanists "emerged one by one on the religious

landscape, isolated radicals in voluntary exile from supernatural theology and churchly intolerance, each pursuing a one-man reformation under the aegis of Unitarianism."[41] The religious humanists appeared within an unorthodox movement of courageous and adventurous individuals who insisted upon being free and independent, critically questioned ancient traditions and established truth, emphasized discovering new truth and re-interpreting old truth, and, in Wilbur's words, "dauntless and unafraid, left all familiar headlands behind them and made for the open sea and the ever-receding horizon."[42] The first advocate was John H. Dietrich in Spokane, Washington, who associated with the Unitarian fellowship after the Reformed Church expelled this minister for heresy. Another was Curtis W. Reese in Des Moines, Iowa, a former Baptist who arose to leadership in Chicago. A third pioneer humanist was Charles Francis Potter who established the First Humanist Society in New York City. Inflamed by sermons, tracts, books, resolutions, and letters to editors, humanism swept through the Unitarian movement, becoming the most dynamic and distinctive theological controversy since New England Transcendentalism. Dietrich, Reese, and Potter were colleagues in that unconventional company who were like brilliant comets blazing brightly across the darkened sky, seemingly unrelated to the swirling constellations that wheel majestically through unfathomed space, or flames lighting a series of scattered fires that release living sparks that ignite a steadily growing conflagration.

## Structural Strain

The complex religious controversy that errupted following World War 1 exhibited striking similarities to the nineteenth-century dispute when the Congregational Church in New England was disrupted by the rationalistic Unitarians, and a generation later when the Unitarians were challenged by the Transcendentalists. During the 1920s and 1930s, the historic "faith once delivered to the saints" was scrutinized by critical thinkers who questioned a pervailing religion regarded as eternal and unchanging truth. The "dialectical enjoinment" with conservative clergymen developed when religious modernists such as Harry Emerson Fosdick discredited the supernatural dimensions of religion and disparaged biblical literalism using a sophisticated higher criticism, and scientists and philosophers of science championed a hypothesis of evolution that contradicted the descriptions of creation contained in the sacred scriptures and undermined faith in the infallibility of holy writ. The modernist-fundamentalist controversy in American religious thought and the humanist-theist conflict within the Unitarian movement raised anew the crucial question provoked by the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformation: What constitutes the source of ultimate authority in theological speculation? The perceptive humanists sharpened the central contention by challenging the epistemic presupposition undergirding traditional religious affirmations.

During this turbulent time, unorthodox religious thought became a self-evident trend when scientific world-views were accepted by countless persons in a creative environment where new ideas were encouraged, dramatic public debates focused significant theological issues, and popular books discarded the established concepts concerning divinity. The intellectual ferment fostered

enormous enthusiasm for the future prospect, nurtured self-reliance as people addressed perplexing social problems, and disillusioned thoughtful persons with orthodox religion and historic institutions. During decades when increased individual freedom permitted people to address pivitol theological positions, Thomas H. Huxley and Robert G. Ingersoll labored to eliminate the two-sided orientation that characterized conventional Christianity.[43] Through their spirited rhetorical exchanges, Huxley and Ingersoll portrayed human history abd destiny with the same format employed by Christian theologians who pictured the fierce struggle between good and evil; these spokesmen discredited the rancid dogmatism that develops when conservative churchmen claim the exclusive possession of ultimate truth; and they demonstrated persuasively how theological absolutism is inconsistent and incompatible with scientific inquiry and intellectual liberty.

During the fundamentalist-modernist confrontation, two dramatically different world-views and moral philosophies collided within an intellectual milieau where the skillful employment of scientific methodologies weakened a reliance upon "authority" and "tradition." Sager described fundamentalism as a twentieth-century movement of protest and defense that sought to perpetuate an apocalyptic and prophetic message that criticized modern thought and was fearful about the future, by exercising a mentality that celebrated zest uninformed with knowledge and praised fixed beliefs oblivious toward the inevitable march of time.[44] Sager wrote that modernism was a mentality for interpreting Christian literature and tradition before becoming a corpus containing conclusions; that some advocates asserted that modernism culminated not in conclusions but with a methodology and a temperament; and that the successful propagation of modernism as a message

made the buddings into movement proportions eventual.[45]

From the printing presses and the publishing houses emerged a substantive literature reflecting how growing pressures exerted from a predominante scientific world-view required a revolution in reformulating religious beliefs and practices. Charles Darwin's books inflicted a powerful impact in a contemporary culture where a growing casm and yawning abyss separated benighted believers from an empirically perceived and scientifically tested reality. The centuries-old controversy that pitted science against religion was sharpened and focused during the later nineteenth century when Darwin's On The Origin of Species appeared in 1859 and his The Decent of Man followed in 1871. During the final quarter century, a favorite subject for discussion in the journals, on lecture platforms, in Chautauqua tents, and from pulpits was whether science and religion could be reconciled or whether these conflicting perspectives were irreconcilably deadlocked.[46]

Darwin's theory of evolution presented a concept of natural selection that spread subsequently through every branch of human learning, upset entire patterns of knowledge, and established the first general principle of biological science. Observing that species change with passing time and adapt to conditions within their environs, Darwin theorized that all species originate through descent, with modifications, from other species; he described a force popelling every kind of adapted structure into gaps within the economy of nature by thrusting out the weaker species; and the writer maintained that natural selection worked automatically, elimating the possibility of divine intervention.[47] On The Origin Species discredited belief in the special creation of species described in the Bible, indicated that evolution provided an answer for the diversity among living beings

upon the earth, replaced the divine creation of species with a process called natural selection, and suggested that humanity was not unique but similar to other animals inhabiting the planet.

Sigmund Freud's The Future of an Illusion described humanity's quest to envision the gods as infantile projection, dismissed this malady as a universal obsessional neurosis that disturbs mankind, and attributed religious origins to the necessity for developing protection fron nature's power and the human desire for ameliorating civilization's shortcomings.[48] Seeking refuge fron nature, people utilize an "infantile model" and endow natural forces with the potency attributable to a father-figure. Personifying these powers to designate the divinity, persons construct illusions that reconcile themselves with a hostile environment and compensate individuals for their inexplainable suffering. Freud described how these constructs become sanctioned with sacred sources, relegated beyond human contrivance, and projected to encompass nature and the universe. Freud concluded that although human civilization is constructed from these personified projections, and although social survival requires that a majority within a population to embrace these constructs, nevertheless contemporary civilization is endangered by preserving, rather than relinquishing, these illusions.

In Religion Without Revelation Julian Huxley recognized that the present is the first time when humanity has grasped control of the extensive evolutionary process that became self-conscious through human ascendancy. Believing that man's dominance entails enormous possibilities for human progress, Huxley emphasized man's creative participation in guiding the evolutionary thrust.

Humanity's intelligent and conscientious efforts in directing evolutionary process becomes facilitated by the advent of scientific methodologies, which extends human control over the physical universe and provides a theoretical framework for formulating a relevant religious philosophy. The author asserted that the discoveries from physiology and psychology necessitate a naturalistic hypothesis that renounces the supernatural and regards spiritual influences as simply natural. Huxley recognized that religious philosophies are scientific discoveries are creations from the human mind, but he contended that truth is not revealed completely but progressively discovered. Anticipating the religious situation, he prescribed the death-of-God:

> Today, God can no longer be considered as the controller of the universe in any but a Pickwickian sense. The god hypothesis is no longer of any pragmatic value for the interpretation or comprehension of nature, and indeed often stands in the way of better and truer interpretation. Operationally, God is beginning to resemble not a ruler, but the last fading smile of a cosmic Cheshire Cat. 49

The gods were regarded as intellectual rationalizations required during primitive developmental stages, but Huxley claimed that religious philosophies and scientific perspectives grow and change through passing centuries. Every human activity, tinged with the quality of the holy, is religious. For countless contemporary individuals, Huxley provided an inspiring perspective about human's place and purpose within a mysterious universe. "Man," he stated,

> ...is still a young species, and civilization, if we date it from the twin discoveries of metal-working and agriculture, is a mere day in the biological centuries. But so rapid, during that negligible period of less than 10,000 years, has been the evolutionary advance made possible by speech and tradition and the other new properties of the human organism, that it is now justifiable to say that civilized man is in his adolescence, and has the chance of attaining maturity. 50

Progressing from adolescence toward maturity, humanity evidences an awesome dignity that Huxley described eloquently:

> From the point of view of the stellar universe, whose size and meaningless spaces baffle comprehension and belief, man may appear a mere nothing, and all his efforts destined to disappear like the web of a spider brushed down from the corner of a little room in the basement of a palace; but meanwhile he is engaged upon a task which is the most valuable of any known, the most valuable which by him can be imagined, the task of imposing mind and spirit upon matter and outer force. 51

Sometimes patronized an the country's most profound philosopher, John Dewey assisted in establishing the philosophical schools of pragmatism, functional psychology, and progressive education. He formulated his fundamental assumption that nature, encountered through everyday experience and science, constitutes ultimate reality and that humanity as a creature of nature secures meaning and purpose within the here-and-now. The emerging religious humanism secured effective expression and achieved significance influence when Dewey's A Common Faith appeare during 1934 and explained god and the religious element in terms of an ever-enlarging ideal, projected from human experiences until they become the harmonizing principle of everything. He concluded correctly that the intellectual credibility of religious affirmations are shaken profoundly when growing knowledge disproves the supposed supernatural character of the founders of religions, when biblical criticism dispells the supernatural inspiration attributed to religious literature, and when anthropolical and psychological research reveals the human sources of religious teachings and practices. Dewey explained that

> the growth of knowledge and its methods and tests has been such as to make acceptance of these beliefs increasingly onerous and even impossible for large numbers of cultivated men and women....
>
> The significant bearing for my purpose of all this is that new methods of inquiry and reflection have become for the educated man today the final arbiter of all questions of fact, existence, and intellectual assent....

> The mind of man is being habituated to a new method and ideal: There is but one sure road of access to truth - the road of patient, cooperative inquiry operating by means of observation, experiment, record and controlled reflection. 52

Dewey decried the claim that religion possesses a monopoly of ideals and the supernatural means with which these ideals become disclosed. Inhibiting the realization of distinctively religious values inherent within natural experience, religion prevents, through the weight of historic encumbrances, the religious quality of experience from coming into man's consciousness and securing effective expression. Dewey concluded that the contemporary intellectual crisis in religious belief and the incapacity to experience religious quality in human experience can be diminished if persons ponder an actualized religious reality that nurtures social progress and human fraternity. Dewey envisioned a universal community:

> The community of causes and consequences in which we, together with those not born, are enmeshed is the widest and deepest of the symbol of the mysterious totality of being the imagination calls the universe. It is the embodiment for sense and thought of that encompassing scope of existence the intellect cannot grasp. It is the matrix within which our ideal aspirations are born and bred. It is the source of the values that the moral imagination projects as directive criteria and as shaping purposes....
>
> The continuing life of this comprehensive community of beings includes all the significant achievements of men in science and art and all the kindly offices of intercourse and communication....
>
> The unification of what is known at any given time, not upon an impossible eternal and abstract basis but upon that of its bearing upon the unification of human desire and purpose, furnishes a sufficient creed for human acceptance, one that would provide a religious release and reinforcement of knowledge. 53

## Ideology

Stemming from a prestigious philosophical movement in Greek, Roman, and Chinese sources, humanism flourished during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries in Western Europe as a prominent tendency pervading liberal education. The term "Humanismus" was coined by a German educator who discerned this emphasis within secondary education.[54] Renaissance humanism comprised a distinctive phase in the rhetorical tradition within Western culture, emminating from classical Greek and Roman writings. Although students during the Renaissance were more concerned with promoting individual growth than with building institutions, and while they emphasized man as an individual rather than masses, humanistic studies nurtured the many-faceted individual, the complete person, homo universale. Desiderius Erasmus represented Renaissance humanism, especially when his The Praise of Folly was placed on the church's index of forbidden books, his critical study analyzing the New Testament was expurgated, and Erasmus was condemned as an impossible heretic by the Council of Trent.[55] Renaissance humanists emphasized humane studies, humaniora or studia humanitatis, stemming from the prominent Roman philosopher-statesman who believed that the poet or speaker was best qualified to communicate liberal learning. Subsequently Italian humanists rediscovered the classical Greek definition of man as a living creature endowed with speech.[56] Robertson recognized that the Renaissance represented an evolution of cultural forces during the middle ages that was stimulated by rediscovered classical texts, and that the Renaissance provides "the greatest historical illustration of the sociological law that the higher civilizations arise through the passing-on of seeds of culture from older to newer societies, under conditions that specially foster them and give them freer growth."[57] During the Renaissance, reason was accepted as the instrument

for discovering the good, popular education provided a method for securing social improvement, supposed supernatural revelations and the ecclesiastical establishment received rigorous rational scrutiny, and humanity was revered as the highest known creature in the universe. Humanism encouraged the creative employment of the scholastic method in liberal education, and this emphasis produced modern historical methods and the emergent scholarly disciplines.[58] Sustaining this academic approach were several characteristic convictions: that a truth deeper than orthodox Christianity would supplant or modify traditional religion if new thoughts were tolerated, that truth is never revealed to humans perfect and complete but becomes discovered progressively through experience and experiment, and that persons know neither absolute truth nor certainty but probability and an inevitable relativity.[59] Through the succeeding centuries, the humanistic emphasis maintained a cultural continuity, emerged in subsequent generations from an enduring philosophical tradition, and provided an historical foundation for contemporary religious humanism.

Although public interest seldom grasps religious humanism as a sinister conspiracy endangering the American Republic, conservative churchmen become apprehensive because an obscure footnote contained in the court case Torcaso v. Watkins mentioned contemporary non-theistic religious groups such as Buddhists, Taoists, Ethical Culturalists, and secular humanists. Religious humanism as an ideology was described by The Library of Congress Subject Headings as "a movement, originating in American Unitarianism, which stressed the idea that man can satisfy all his religious needs from within himself and discarded in its advanced thought

all theistic concepts."[60] Hence religious humanism remains predominately atheistic. Although religious humanism resists arbitrary, inflexible definitions, this distinctive ideology is characterized by an emphatic focus upon man Shinn stated:

> Humanism is the appreciation of man and of the values, real and potential, in human life. It esteems man - not as an animal, a machine, or an angel, but as a man. It is concerned with the agonies and triumphs of the human spirit, not in any racial or religious or intellectual elite, but in the whole range of history and experience. It may be humble or haughty, accurate or mistaken in its judgments, but always it cherishes humanity. 61

Realizing that contemporary humanism comprises a diverse phenomenona although humanists embrace a man-centered paradigm, Marty constructed a categorical classification for comprehending this unorthodox contingency.[62] Secularist humanism was represented with such groups as the American Association for the Advancement of Atheism. Secular humanism was described as considerably less creed-oriented, attracting more adherents, sometimes religiously indifferent or agnostic, but a quasi-religion competing with the historic faiths and sometimes claiming social privileges, and a tentative expression that minimizes symbols, myths, and rituals. Religious Humanism was characterized as organized, including the editors who publish the journal Religious Humanism, a particular movement within modern Unitarian Universalism, adherents embracing Ethical Culture, and the members who comprised the nineteenth-century Free Religious Association. Humanities humanists, the most numerous constituency, includes adherents from other categories but consists predominately of university professors. Christian humanists, exemplified with Erasmus and Aquinas, practice the intellectual love of God and discipline reason with faith. While these descriptions and definitions become subject to misinterpretation and misunderstanding, specific associations sometimes indicate

distinct emphases within humanism. Religious humanism as a rhetorical movement received transient attention in 1980 when a New York Times article reported that sixty-one humanists denounced supernaturalism, repudiated traditional concepts of God, and denied the divinity of Jesus; these articulate advocates simultaneously cautioned their contemporaries that dogmatic religious authoritarianism endangers intellectual freedom, threatens human rights, and inhibits scientific progress.[63]

Similar to revolutionary movements issuing manifestoes, religious humanists periodically circulate updated statements that indicate an ideology and assert an identity. Religious humanism secured important initial expression during the winter, 1932-1933, when a Chicago group attempted to articulate the essential affirmations in "A Humanist Manifesto," the initial draft of which was written by Professor Roy Wood Sellars from the University of Michigan.[64] The manifesto stated that humanity is becoming conscious that humans alone are responsible for actualizing the world of their dreams; that they have within themselves the resources for realizing this achievement; and that an expanding understanding of man and the universe requires a new religious perspective. The manifesto maintained that humanists regard the universe as self-existing and not created; that humanity is a part of nature developing through a continuous process; that the traditional mind and body dichotomy should be discarded; that religious culture and civilization develop gradually through human interaction with the natural environment and man's social heritage; and that the individual is moulded significantly by the culture into which an infant is born. Humanism, the manifesto maintained, asserts that the nature of the universe revealed by modern science makes unacceptable any cosmic or supernatural guarantees sustaining human values. Religious humanism emphasizes the complete actualization of human personality in the immediate here-and-now.

A second humanist manifesto appeared in 1973, forty years following the initial statement. Considerably less optimistic that the first manifesto but still encouraging an affirmative vision of the future, the signers renounced traditional theism as unproved and outmoded, rejected "salvationism" as diverting persons with false hopes about heaven, and reported discovering no divine purpose or providence sustaining the human species.[65] These religious humanists asserted that science affirms that humanity emerges through natural evolutionary process and that people should perceive themselves as integral within nature. These adherents accepted the preciousness and dignity of the individual person as a central value, and specified an ultimate goal as the fulfillment of human personality. These ardent advocates described humanism as an ethical process and proclaimed several positive principles relevant to the present human condition that might precipitate coordinated social action, guide humanity toward a promising future, and promote a secular society upon a planetary scale. These humanists explained that a turning-point was reached requiring mankind to transcend national sovereignty and cultivate world community. They recommended radically new human purposes, rather than restructuring traditional religion, believing that religion can perpetuate old dependencies, encourage escapism, become obscurantist, and restrict intellectual freedom.

In 1981 a third manifesto described humanism as a dynamic modern movement repudiating supernatural sanctions and committed explicitly to democracy, under unwarranted attack radical right-wing extremists antithetical to reason and liberty. Among the ten specific principles endorsed by the signers are commitment to free inquiry, separation of church and state, the ideal of freedom, ethics based on critical intelligence, moral education, religious skepticism, reason, science and

technology, evolution, and education. Developed long before religionists constructed moral systems upon an alleged divine authority, ethics, as a branch of human knowledge and an autonomous area of inquiry, attests that ethical judgments can be formulated independently from revealed religion and that humans who cultivate practical reason and wisdom can achieve lives of virtue and excellence. Although no specific sect monopolizes essential human values, humanists estoł no definite morality but recommend scientific methodology for discovering and explaining rational moral principles. Committed to individual intellectual freedom, the signers said:

> In the long struggle in the history of ideas, established institutions, both public and private, have attempted to censor inquiry, to impose orthodoxy on beliefs and values, and to excommunicate heretics and extripate unbelievers....
>
> The lessons of history are clear: wherever one religion or ideology is established and given a dominant position in the state, minority opinions are in jeopardy....
>
> Secular humanist ethics maintains that it is possible for human beings to lead meaningful and worthwhile lives for themselves and in service to their fellow human beings without the need of religious commandments or the benefit of clergy....
>
> Secular humanism places trust in human intelligence rather than in divine guidance. Skeptical of theries of redemption, damnation, and reincarnation, secular humanists attempt to approach the human situation in realistic terms: human beings are responsible for their own destinies. 66

These humanists denounced as a sham attempts to mask religious faith as scientific truth and to inflict theological doctrine upon the scientific curriculum; and while the signers acclaimed scientific methodologies as the best approach for understanding the world, they are open to the modification of all principles, including those that govern inquiry, believing that they might require constant correction. An anti-theistic affirmation was evident, not simply apparent:

> However, we find that traditional views of the existence of God either are meaningless, have not yet been demonstrated to be true, or are tyrannically exploitive. Secular humanists may be agnostics, atheists, rationalists, or skeptics, but they find sufficient evidence for the claim that some divine purpose exists for the universe. They reject the idea that God has intervened miraculously in history and revealed himself to a chosen few, or that he can save or redeem sinners. 67

## Leadership

Religious humanism as an emergent scientific perspective was espoused effectively by John H. Dietrich, Curtis W. Reese, and Charles Francis Potter.[68] Recognizing that the scientific and anti-supernaturalist world-views pervaded Western civilization, these speakers formulated a contemporary humanism that became a powerful for traditional theology within American Unitarianism.

### John Hassler Dietrich

Dietrich, considered as the father of American religious humanism, was born on a Chambersburg, Pennsylvania farm on January 14, 1878. In 1893, the family moved to Marks, Pennsylvania, where John entered Mercersburg Academy and graduated as valedictorian in 1896. Four years later he graduated from Franklin and Marshall College in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, and returned to Mercersburg. The following autumn, he became a private secretary to New York multi-millionaire Jonathan Thorne, occasionally attended All Souls Unitarian Church, and saved finances to attend Eastern Theological Seminary. Following seminary graduation in 1905, he served St, Mark's Memorial Church in Pittsburgh, which was associated with the Allegheny Classis of the Reformed Church. This theistic Protestant minister became popular, church membership doubled,

and Sunday attendance trippled. Dietrich's suspected unorthodoxy prompted the Allegheney Classis to indict Dietrich for heresy because he renounced biblical infallibility, Jesus' virgin birth and divinity, and the vicarious atonement. Dietrich accepted evolution, abandoned the Apostles Creed, and invited a liberal Reform rabbi to speak at St. Marks. During a heresy trial conducted in 1911, he declined to defend himself and became defrocked.

Severed from Reform suppression, he became an associate member of the American Unitarian Association ministerial fellowship. Having declined a invitation to serve as a colleague at the First Unitarian Church in Pittsburgh, Dietrich became the minister of the First Unitarian Society in Spokane, Washington, in 1911. When he departed in 1916, the congregation had grown from sixty to fifteen hundred, and the group had moved from a delapotated building into a recently completed theater. In 1916, he commenced his ministry at the First Unitarian Society in Minneapolis, where he emerged as the acknowledged humanist clergyman. He exerted leadership in defeating state legislation that would prohibit teaching evolution in public schools. To accommodate growing audiences, he commenced broadcasting church services; and the congregation moved into the spacious Garrick Theater. In 1927, a sermon collection, The Fathers of Evolution, and a sermon series, "The Humanist Pulpit," appeared. Dietrich composed two popular pamphlets that were circulated by the American Unitarian Association, The Significance of the Unitarian Movement in 1927 and Humanism in 1934. Tragedy accompanied honor when his wife died during 1931 and he was awarded a doctor of divinity degree in 1934 from Meadville Theological School. During his distinguished Minneapolis ministry, he

served as minister, 1916-1936; senior minister, 1936-1938; and minister emeritus, 1938-1957.

Dietrich described humanism as an enlightened attitude springing from a naturalistic interpretation of the scientifically studied universe. Recognizing a significant paradigm shift, he indicated, "Humanism in religion is the shifting of emphasis from God to man, making the enrichment of human life, rather than the glorification of God, the object of our allegiance and consecration."[69] Humanism was presented as universal and non-sectarian; and the movement was described as a rapidly spreading persuasion.Distinctive characteristics were the non-theistic affirmations and non-dogmatic attitude:

> Humanism simply ignores the idea of God, failing to see any evidence of intelligent purpose in the universe, which surely is the minimun basis of Theism. Its attitude is one of open-mindedness and inquiry, not of denial. However, its whole program is based on the assumption of an indifferent universe, of which man is a natural unpurposed product, and in which he must by his own effort carve out his destiny. 71

The Minneapolis preacher described the cosmic processes as unaware and impartial about humanity, regarded evolutionary forces as controllable by humans, and considered mankind as that position within the cosmic processes where theuniverse becomes self-conscious. Renouncing supposedly supernatural interference and seeking constantly to improve the human condition, the humanist attempts to improve the human condition rather than to establish correct relationships with divinity.

The unorthodox clergyman knew that the popular religion pervading Western civilization encountered their most serious crisis, and he predicted that historic Christianity had entered the final stages and eventually would disappear. However religion has provided an essential adaptive faculty throughout human history.[72]

Accepting modern scientific methodologies for discovering and testing truth-claims, he recommended employing these techniques for analyzing religious phenomenona. "I do not believe everything that is taught under the name of science," he explained, "but I do believe in the supermacy of the scientific method, or if you choose, the experimental method."[73] Dietrich asserted that when nature remains constant and scientific methodologies are used, scholars can comprehend humanity's historical development and calculate the future prospect. Religion, he believed, stems from human origins, exists because religion sustains human existence, and changes with man's historical development. Religion represents a developmental stage within a larger life process, a means by which humans attempt to adapt themselves to their environs and make existence more congenial, and a method for securing conditions more favorable to securing an abundant life. Dietrich emphasized the primacy of religious experience, and he explained that concepts concerning divinity are not the cause but a consequence of religious experience.

Having conceptualized religious humanism without God, Dietrich studied Jesus and concluded that the destiny of Christianity would be determined by the contemporary controversy surrounding Jesus because historically the foundation supporting Christianity is Jesus. Although accurate understanding of Jesus became distorted, a probable historical residuum justifies assuming the existence of Jesus as a specific person around whom myths and misinterpretations were generated.[74] Exhaustive examinations analyzing the stories reporting Jesus' birth and alleged resurrection reveal these narratives as historically incredible and unconvincing. Dietrich maintained that if Jesus actually existed as an actual person, he was a

man of his own time who cannot be separated from first-century Palestine. Jesus' gospel-sayings are not original; similar and sometimes identical statements are recorded in earlier writings. Further, Jesus' precepts are irrelevant to modern living; imitating Jesus or applying his teachings would cause the collapse of Western civilization. "I do not believe," he reasoned,

> that this individual of two thousand years ago can be placed at the top of ethical achievement any more than Aristotle can be placed at the top of scientific achievement....
>
> It is quite unlikely that such an untutored and inexperienced youth could have been the intellectual and moral colossus of the ages; and it is surely improbable that he could have devised an ethical system which would be adequate to a civilization of which he never dreamed. 75

An image representing Jesus becomes constructed by each believer; thus he constitutes an idealized character created in a manner discovered within all world religion.

Dietrich considered the Bible as a compendium containing religious and ethical literature similar to writings from other ancient people; this historical compilation preserves early Hebrew and subsequent Christian mythology, history, biography, poetry, and drama. These scriptures abound with inconsistencies, anachronisms, and superstitions. Hence the Bible constitutes a "purely secular product of fallible and relatively ignorant men, and contains no more truth or has any more authority than any other collection of ancient literature."[76] However the Minneapolis humanist contended that pre-scientific beliefs that are inconsistent with modern value-systems and scientific world-views sometimes impede humanity's continued development. Dietrich proposed constructing a Bible of Man, containing a universal interpretation of humanity's ethical and religious experiences, related meaningfully to contemporary living and drawn comprehensively from the world's inspiring and consoling literature without drawing a dichotomy between "sacred" and "secular" writing and without dividing literature that proceeded Jesus from

that which followed his appearance.[77]

Dietrich concepts about Man's Bible were consistent with his description of genuine religion as a universal emotional response. His relentless inquiry disclosed religion as an unmistakable qualitative dimension enriching human experience and stemming from similar emotional response, human rather than Christian, Mohammedan, or Jewish:

> We never mistake a man's religious attitudes or devotions for anything else. It is the same with the Catholic dropping on adoring knees before the blessed virgin, and with the Buddhist gazing in homage on a statue of Buddha, and with the Greek extending out his arms to Apollo - and with the savage standing mute before a sacred stone - yes, and with the Humanist, hushed and subdued, as he thinks of those conditions on which the health and safety of the race depend. 78

However he emphasized the humanist's responsibility for pioneering persistently toward the beconing frontiers of spiritual and ethical understanding.[79]

When Dietrich renounced the orthodox Christian world-view and championed a humanist perspective predicated upon contemporary science, he discarded the divinity's possible participation in creating the universe:

> The origin of the universe is one of those questions on which atheism has wisely been silent, and it insists that all attempts to deal with such a question can only result in a meaningless string of words. He insists that the theist's explanation is no more sensible than his, for assuming the existence of a God who created the universe, you have left the baffling problem of the origin of God. 80

He affirmed an ever-existent, self-sustaining universe and assumed that everything within the universe always existed and evolved through an ever-changing stream of existence. Perhaps some swirling nebula exploded, sending fragments flying through space, and finally forming the universe:

> Solar systems are born and die like everything else. I believe that our earth, like the other planents in our system, was thrown off from the sun and originally consisted of a mass of molten matter, which as it whirled through space gradually cooled and solidified into its present form...I expect it slowly to decay, in time to become uninhabitable, and eventually to cease to exist....

> I believe that is natural beginning of life is the starting point of that long process of development, known as biological evolution, which has resulted in many kinds of plants and animals, and which has crowned itself with the evolution of the human race. 81

Although he never discerned evidence attesting that nature's processes are guided by some supreme intelligence actualizing a discernible purpose, he remained open-minded and non-dogmatic.[82]

As continuous scientific research revealed a fresh perspective about the universe, increasing inquiry disclosed new insights about humanity. No longer regarded as a fallen angel expelled from a prehistoric paradise, man was seen as a wonder crowning earth's animal kingdom but an outcast in an indifferent universe. Within the twentieth-century technology, man's distinctive humanity was threatened with mechanization, standardization, and conformity. Dietrich resisted these formidable cultural tendencies and pressures by encouraging creative thought and explaining that

> only as we permit this variation of thought can any progress be made; and the more we encourage it, the greater progress we will have. It at any stage of human evolution, every one had been made to conform exactly to the accepted forms of thought, human development would have been stopped at that point and our social world remained the same. 83

Dietrich believed that a society composed of persons forced into uniform thinking must eventually stagnate; that progress happens when some individuals refuse to conform; and that human history records how a creative minority can resist mass conformity and change society.Dietrich never des ibed man as an angel; instead, humanity was considered as in the process of transition from the animal into the ideal man.[84] Nevertheless the unorthodox clergyman repudiated human depravity, vicarious atonement, and eternal damnation with a contemporary humanist philosophy that replaced conventional Christianity:

> If the first man never sinned as described in the book of Genesis, then there is no sin for his descendants to inherit; if there is no sin to inherit, then every child is not conceived in sin and born in iniquity, and human nature is not totally depraved; if human nature is not totally depraved, then there is no need of all men and women, by the mere fact of their humanity, being condemned to future punishment, and the whole conception of hell forthwith vanishes, like an ugly dream; and if there is no hell, then of course there is no need of salvation; and if there is no need of salvation, then of course there is no need of atonement; and if there is no need of atonement, then there is no need of God sending into the world his only begotten son that through him the world might be saved. 85

Humanist salvation, accordingly, occurs when homo sapiens liberate themselves from animalistic passions, actualize their latent capacities, and discipline their lives. Humanist salvation happens not through a supernatural saviour, but by individuals themselves.

Within an indifferent universe where death remains an unavoidable reality, humans are a temporary expression of the evolutionary force that momentarily arose to consciousness before eventually receeding. Death was described by Dietrich as absolute unconsciousness, absolute silence, and eternal sleep without dreams.[86] Although he considered the soul as a figment of the imagination, he acknowledged an immortality of influence that endures simply because

> every man leaves behind him that which enters into the construction of civilization. The individual as a conscious person may perish but he continues to live in the race as an influence, just as the whole past history of the race lives in him. 87

## Curtis Williford Reese

Born into a conservative Southern Baptist family in Madison County, North Carolina, on September 3, 1887. Curtis W. Reese was converted and baptized as a

nine-year-old child. In 1908 he graduated from Mars Hill Baptist College and was ordained as a Baptist minister. Reese briefly served a small rural Baptist church before entering seminary. The young minister graduated from the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, in 1910; subsequently he became a state evangelist representing the Illinois State Baptist Association. Reese continued his education at Ewing College and received a Ph.B. degree in 1911. He served the First Baptist Church in Tiffin, Ohio; however he left the Baptist denomination in 1913 when his theologically became too intellectually sophisticated. The unorthodox clergyman served Unitarian congregations in Alton, Illinois, and Des Moines, Iowa, before accepting appointment as the Secretary of the Western Unitarian Conference in 1919. He served on the board of trustees of Meadville Theological School. In 1930 he resigned his position with the Western Conference and assumed the deanship of Abraham Lincoln Center in Chicago. As a founder of the American Humanist Association, he served as the president for fourteen years.

Important impetus for spreading religious humanism developed when Reese addressed the Harvard Summer School of Theology during 1920. This leader of the humanist movement expressed a central humanist conviction:

> Historically the basic content of religious liberalism is spiritual freedom. Out of this basic content has come the conviction of the supermacy of reason, of the primary worth of character, and of the immediate access of man to spiritual sources. Always religious liberalism has tended to replace alleged divine revelations and commands with human opinions and judgments; to develop the individual attitude in religion; and to identify righteousness with life. 88

Reese explained that religious humanists emphasize the essentially natural character of religion, consider religion as commitment to human causes and objectives, and stipulate the goal of genuine religion as the self-actualization of personality.

However religious humanists seek more than material ends and are unsatisfied with individual freedom alone. These unconventional believers encourage a paradigm shift in "authority from an indefinite something somewhere, to a definite self known to be native to human existence."[89] Reese regarded social institutions as simply tentative, temporary expressions designed to develop human personality; however these organizations are inevitably outgrown and should be shattered and abandoned like a chrysalis' hull.

The speaker contended that although religious liberals are undogmatic about God, most would remain unshaken even though the concepts of God were abandoned. Reese stated:

> Nevertheless, the liberal recognizes and zealously proclaims the fact that purposive and powerful cosmic processes are operative, and that increasingly man is able to co-operate with them and in a measure control them. What these processes be styled is of but little importance.... This is seen in the amoeba as it adjusts its structure for the attainment of the ends desired; in the living protoplasmic cells on the ends of the rootlets of beans and wheat. both apparently identical, the one refusing flint, the other receiving it; in the co-operative colony of the sponge and the daisy, the bee and the wolf; and in the marvelous neural arrangement of man. 90

Although ancient people considered these cosmic processes as supernatural events or as natural forces manipulated by supernatural agencies, scientific methodologies and regulated observation permit persons to know that these processes are natural and lawful and that some are subject to human control. Reese described religious humanism as understanding the self as inherently worthwhile and securing the widest human service in promoting social improvement.

When Reese delivered the anniversary address for the American Unitarian Association assembled in Boston's Arlington Street Church on May 18, 1947, he emphasized the essential humanist values as essential in religion.[91]

## Charles Francis Potter

Born October 28, 1885, into a devout Baptist family residing in Marlboro, Massachusetts, Potter was eventually licensed to preach in the Baptist Church when he was seventeen years old. He entered Bucknell University in 1903 and graduated summa cum laude during 1907. Entering Newton Theological Institute, he financed his theological education by serving Calvin Baptist Church in Dover, New Hampshire, and subsequently Mattapan Baptist Church. Potter became a Unitarian minister in 1914 and served a mission congregation in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. In 1916 he became the minister of the Marlboro, Massachusetts, Unitarian Church; then during 1919 he moved to New York City to serve the West Side Unitarian Church. In 1925 he resigned his pulpit and became the Executive Secretary at Antioch College in Yellow Springs, Ohio. Two years later he administered the Bureau of Lectures of the National Association of Book Publishers. Then during 1928 Potter became minister of the Universalist Church of the Divine Paternity in New York City. In June, 1929 he resigned and announced that during the autumn he would establish the First Humanist Society of New York. On September 29, 1929, the first meeting of the new congregation was conducted in Steinway Hall. During the autumn, 1930, the society moved into the beautiful concert hall of the Barbizon-Plaza. Potter established the Euthanasia Society of America during 1938.

Potter attained national renown through a series of debates with fundamentalist John Roach Straton that were conducted in Carnegie Hall and eventually published,[92] when he assisted the defense during the trial of John T. Scopes,[93]

and when he delivered an address on the "World of Religion" program that was broadcast nationally by the National Broadcasting Company.[94]

During the first meeting of the society, Potter observed that religious progress was slow when compared with scientific progress and recognized that the great world religions began during a period resembling the present when an historical event or recent discovery disturbed the established religion. He explained that in "the fullness of time some person torn with the conflict within his own personality, by great travail gives birth to some unifying concept of life, a new interpretation of all existence, a new religion."[95] The speaker stated that intellectual freedom and human progress are inhibited when a seer's vision become interpreted as unchanging truth. A distinction between world religion and humanism is that humanists acknowledge the source of their beliefs in human personality. Potter maintained that no evidence of the divine is discovered except in human life and that developing this quality within humanity is a central concern of religious humanists.

In a humanist encyclical, Potter described humanism as a consciencious attempt to improve the quality of human life by twentieth-century minds confronting contemporary problems.[96] The speaker envisioned a struggle to the death fought in the realm of ideals between theists and humanists, explained that humanists are constructing not a cathedral of stone but a cathedral of humanity, and contended that the Commonwaelth of Man will not descend from the sky on angel wings. Potter emphasized that humanists are concerned with developing human personality, individually and socially. Humanism encourages personal responsibility and social progress through an enlightened ethical activism.

Potter stated in another address that the humanist who is agnostic about the existence of God and immortality has a different attitude toward life than a person who believes in God and immortality. Respecting the past and conscious of the future, a religious humanist conscientiously cultivates a better life upon the earth, believing that an individual's immortality resides in their ongoing contribution to improving human life. He rejected the concept that human spirits become reincarnated through endless cycles. Religious humanists sense that their ancestry extends into the distant past; that they are so intrinsically related to all life that they feel themselves inseparable from this ongoing stream; and that this past and future constitutes a living stream in flowing through every individual. Potter professed that through a sophisticated mysticism that is not supernatural but consistent with scientific perspectives, persons can comprehend all phenomenona and recognize themselves as children of the cosmos. Through mystical consciousness, each individual can apprehend that all things are theirs, not by right of legal possession, but through the greater ownership of appreciation and identification. Through this hightened awareness of relatedness to everything, a person comprehends that all people come from earlier forms that in turn came from matter; that everyone is related through heredity, similar chemical composition, and a thousand more subtle ways.

> Once a man can get a vision of his connection with all that has been, all that is, and all that may be, he needs no anthropmorphic deity, he needs no celestial city in the skies, he comes finally to the point where he can state truthfully, not only that he is related to all life, but that he is part of all life, all life is summed up in him. He is the epitome of the universe.
>
> With this feeling of at-homeness in the world there comes a great peace of soul. This is the real religion underlying all religions. 97

Potter succinctly summarized the dramatic contrast between Calvinist

Christianity and Humanist Unitarianism when he stated that religious humanists believe in a living God, that Jesus taught a way of living, and that living religion nurtures human growth.[98]

## Membership and Organization

Although a person can embrace religious humanism without affiliating with an association, supportive organizations sustain humanisn as a minority movement. In 1983, Kurtz, a prominent humanist leader, stated that the less than ten thousand members affiliated with all humanist associations on the North American continent is less than the membership within a half-dozen large churches and synagogues.[99] Confederations providing communicative networks between humanist constituencies assist in coordinating these collectives. The Fellowship of Religious Humanists, organized in 1961, draws adherents interested in values within a humanist frame-of-reference. The American Humanist Association, which became incorporated as a membership organization in 1941, attempts to bridge the theoretical philosophical speculation and the practical application of humanism. The North American Committee of Humanism was established when forty-five humanists gathered at the University of Chicago in August, 1982.[100] This umbrella association attracts adherents from Humanistic Judaism, Ethical Culture societies, and the left-wing within the Unitarian Universalist Association. Two international organizations hospitable toward humanism are the International Humanist and Ethical Union in Utrecht, Netherlands, and the International Association for Religious Freedom in Frankfurt, Germany.

Among the important, influencial humanist associations is the American Ethical Union, a federation coordinating the Ethical Culture societies established during Felix Adler's career and developed subsequently. The Union's approximately four thousand adherents are concentrated predominately within these twenty-four societies. A statement circulated by the New York Society explains:

> Ethical Culture is a philosophy of life dedicated to the concepts that the highest value on earth is human worth, that we must strive to protect the mother earth upon which we are solely dependent, and that every person on earth has an equal right to live with dignity and in harmony with one another.
>
> While Ethical Culture is recognized as a religion, there is no prayer, communion or confession, no theology or set of doctrines, no scripture. Instead, it provides an opportunity for the individual to develop his own belief about the mysteries of life. 101

Ethical Culture societies discard the belief-systems and social-structures that characterize traditional religion and encourage continuous searching for ever-evolving meanings. For these religious humanists, human worth is a fundamental value; ethical living is the essential purpose. Without creed, doctrine, or ritual, adherents assemble to satisfy their intellectual, emotional, and social needs that are experienced especially during epic moments within everyday experience. Former New York Ethical Society leader Black suggested:

> We are thankful for this fellowship and the opportunity for growth and service that has come to us individually and together. In our deliberations may we respect one another. Where we differ, may we understand one another, and through our differences may we come to wiser solutions to our common problems. May the passion for righteousness that was in the Prophets of Israel, the compassion and love that were in Jesus, be with us. And in all that we think and feel and say and do, may we always be mindful of our kinship with humankind. 102

As a religious-philosophical movement that secures informal organization through societies and a general federation, Ethical Culture constitutes a principle current within the humanist movement.

Although the early twentieth-century humanist-theist controversy divided the Unitarian movement, the humanists eventually secured parity, and perhaps outnumbered the theists. The total number of individual members in the 1,012 Unitarian congregations in 1985 was 178,236, with 129,227 adult members and 39,009 students enrolled in religious education classes.[103] A 1966 national survey conducted by the Unitarian Universalist Association indicated that fifty-eight percent of the respondents identified themselves as non-Christian, fifty-nine percent did not describe their local congregation as Christian, and fifty-six percent stated that members of the community do not consider their congregation as Christian.[104] A 1979 survey indicated that forty-three percent of all members and thirty-seven percent of the new members stated that "God" might be used appropriately "as a name for some natural process within the universe, such as love or creative evolution."[105] A general membership pamphlet indicates:

> Unitarians and Universalists reject the doctrine of the Trinity, the Deity of Christ, the belief in supernatural Miracles, the concept of election as the means of salvation, the concept of Hell as a place to which the dead go to be punished, and, of course, the concept of Purgatory....
>
> Unitarians and Universalists, let it be said clearly, have given up the necessity to accept orthodox beliefs in Revelation, Miracles, Immaculate Conception, Bodily Resurrection, and Salvation, but we have not given up believing. 106

The Unitarian Universalist pilgrimage to fathom deeper understanding seems predicated upon the convictions that humans are rational beings who possess the power to respond intelligently to their surroundings, that human happiness within the here-and-now constitutes the greatest good, and that religious beliefs must be developed experientially and applied pragmatically.

## Agents of Social Control

Religious humanism emerged within a fermenting cultural context where resistance and opposition were engendered by the established traditions, popular consensus, historical events, competitive philosophical movements, and specific criticism. Catastrophic happenings such as World War II crushed the exuberent expectations of an imminent "coming of the Kingdom" and devistated the fertile anticipations of man's evolutionary progress. While Christian theologians brewed a revived "neo-orthodoxy,"[107] provocative European writers such as Sarte and Camus created an essencially negative humanism, existentialism. The joyous conviction that contemporary scientific prowess would create new Edens and restore the race to Paradise dwindled with the Orwellian nightmare of Brave New World and 1984. Like a frosted can of Falstaff left standing in summer's blazing sun, religious humanism lost its flavor and turned sour. A threatening spectre of philosophical nihilism haunted a war-weary Europe sickened with a meaninglessness and purposelessness that varified Nietzsche's prophecies of the-death-of-God.[108] Among the specific criticisms directed against humanism was Hartshorne's Beyond Humanism that appeared in 1937 and argued that humanism neither successfully integrated the entire human personality nor suggested a satisfactory substitute for salvation.[109]

Among the most powerful persuaders within the conservative midwestern United States where Dietrich and Reese populatized an atheistic humanism was the enormously popular Founder and Pastor of the Peoples Church of Chicago, Preston Bradley. From his famous pulpit in Uptown Chicago, he addressed through his radio broadcasts

more individuals than all persons congregated within the Unitarian churches and fellowships scattered across the North American continent. Through eloquent preaching, Bradley constructed a brilliant "rhetorical synthesis" that conserved theism within an intelligible, contemporary, universal religion that professed that God created humanity for the realization of a splendid purpose. Recognizing that religion commences within mystery and wonder, he acknowledges his spiritual kinship with the primitive seekers who inaugurated man's spiritual pilgrimage:

> Who are we who think we know so much to even know the rudiments of the cosmic spiritual universe of which we are all a part? Who are we that in the presence of star dust dare bring our limited intelligence? ...My little brothers of the long ago, my little brothers of the heart of the world, these brothers who found a crooked stick, those who took a pebble and washed it with their tears until its smoothness was like the velvet of the dawn; these who are kinsmen of mine. 110

Reconciling primitive religion with seeming evolution, Bradley emphasized that humans "share in a life principle that pushed itself out of the slime into the sea, out of the sea into the earth, out of the earth into the air, out of the air into the larger Heart of the Eternal."[111] The venerated clergyman discovered divinity empirically within "the existence of the idealistic tendency in civilization that was responsible for life oozing up out of slime until it caught itself upon the reed above the surface of the sea and then started to climb up the side of the banks."[112] Yet he rejected the sacred scriptures as the ultimate source of authority in theological speculation, believing that if the Bible remains the geological and biological textbook for humanity, then civilization has made no advancement since the burning of Michael Servetus during the turbulent sixteenth-century.[113] The preacher maintained that the immediate inspiration that produced philosophical wisdom in the mind of Paul, Homer, Shakespeare, and Emerson continues to function.[114]

As a significant philosophical movement within American religious thought, existentialism nurtured innovations within and beyond the Christian community. An existentialist demanded freedom not because humanity or history evidences a capacity to progress continuously toward a perfected society, but because individuals assert a right to rebellion in an increasingly oppressive civilization. Existentialism provoked a pivotal question, whether religion constitutes a meaningful reality or legitimate function when humanity's ability to comprehend becomes negated by the unknowability of the world. Hence existentialism grew distrustful of essential order within the world, and the existentialist's scepticism separated him or her not simply from religious orthodoxy but from every expression of rationalism, whether classical or scientific. An existentialist understood that an individual, like a culture, summarizes and transcends historical experience. The existential concept of the human condition was characterized by an unyielded willingness to accept unearned suffering and one's own weakness, to struggle persistently for life, and to decide "to be" and "to act" without apparent assistance from supernatural sources and superindividual associations. The existentialist's clear comprehension of human bondage, guilt, anxiety, suffering, and death negated the notions that religion can be socially constructed to sustain human dignity; that persons by their nature possess the power to construct an increasingly meaningful structure of values by cooperating with a benevolent reality; and that persons acting in freedom will grow progressively harmonious. The existentialist recognized perceptively that the arena of final decision resides primarily within the individual, although he or she remains a center of conflicts that become projected externally

as competing institutions and conflicting ideologies. One acknowledges that an individual stands within an arena because life becomes established there; decisions are reached through definite and dominant influences within the area and not from an imaginary Olympus. Eventually an awareness dawns that simply seeking becomes complete emptiness; unless a human understands what one has experienced and can afford to rish everything in an open encounter, then that person remains spiritually stillborn. Recognizing that universal processes are essentially experimental, that the deepest wisdom requires employing seeming failure as a source of new forms of creation, and that creation constitutes estrangement for the sake of love, an existentialist regards every creature as a spontaneous event potentially self-estranging from one's own center, but expressing the creative energy that suggests divinity incarnate. An existentialist understands that a person can extend forgiveness and compassion toward a completed existence precisely because the source of that totality is incarnate within; redemption from suffering and estrangement emanates not from a towering Olympus but is mediated immediately through the communal fellowship binding one's chosen colleagues. The beloved community becomes revealed as all people who forgive the world and their fellows for the tradgedy and pathos that pervades their lives, all persons who bequeath to the future a promise of recovery and redemption even as they perish during the process of an unfolding resurrection. The existentialist learns through experience that everything that is most exquisitely creative endlessly endures hostility and bears, in the image of a suffering servant, the sorrows that suffuse the world.

In today's universities there is a reawakening of interest in religion and spirituality. Perhaps a study of the historical components of religious rhetoric in the United States will help our college students to resolve their own ideas about how to conduct their lives in the next century.

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